



LOUISIANA SENATE

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LOUISIANA STATE SENATE ADJOURNS SINE-DIE AFTER TWO CONSECUTIVE SESSIONS

LEADERSHIP TOUTS PASSAGE OF BALANCED BUDGET, COVID-19 RECOVERY AID, TORT REFORM PACKAGE, AND MORE

Today, the Louisiana legislature adjourned its 2020 First Extraordinary Session, which ran consecutive to the 2020 Regular Session. Lawmakers faced unprecedented challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the largest of those challenges was the adoption of a state-operating budget after losing nearly \$1 billion in forecasted revenue.



While the task of doing so seemed especially daunting, lawmakers were able to agree on a budget plan that totals over \$35 billion in spending for important state programs and services. By using federal assistance and some of the state's own "rainy day" savings funds, legislators avoided having to make huge cuts to agencies and were able to fully fund the popular TOPS program.

Additionally, the legislature agreed on two critical COVID-19 assistance plans – one that steers federal aid money directly to small businesses and one that provides a modest hazard-pay rebate to workers on the frontline.

"When my colleagues and I gathered at the capitol in March, we had no idea how COVID-19 would turn our worlds upside down," said Senate President Page Cortez. "What was once a surplus, quickly became a deficit. We were not able to provide the funding increases that we once hoped to provide. I am extremely proud of the way we were able to come together to pass a budget that still ensures the state's critical needs are met. We were also able to agree

on two important pieces of legislation that help our frontline workers and small businesses get on the road to recovery.”

In addition to the budget and the economic recovery issues brought on by COVID-19, legislators debated several other hot-button issues. One of the most hotly contested issues of both sessions was that of tort reform. Several bills, including one vetoed by Governor Edwards, were debated. In the end, the legislature passed a measure that works to reduce rates by lowering the jury trial threshold, addressing direct action, allowing the admissibility of seatbelt evidence, and altering collateral source rules.

“Our businesses and residents desperately needed us to find a way to pass tort reform legislation. In the end, I believe we were able to do that and it is my hope that Louisianans will see that reflected in the premiums they pay to their auto insurance companies in the future,” added President Cortez.

The legislature also debated and agreed on several other topics including improvements to the criminal justice system, expanding broadband Internet connectivity, legalizing fantasy sports games, providing better cybersecurity, and more.

“These sessions were not easy. Beyond the challenges that come with the start of any new term, COVID-19 made our jobs that much more difficult. Overall, I believe that we were able to come together in an efficient manner to provide for our citizens,” said President Cortez. “I want to thank all of our Senators as well as Speaker Schexnayder and members of the House of Representatives for everyone’s cooperation and hard work. While I know the ramifications of the virus are far from over, I am confident that we, as an independent legislature, will be able to continue our efforts as a united body as we work to help Louisiana recover and move our state forward.”

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